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ABSTRACT

This proactive research and development model presents data of misfortune, reality, and hope for approximately 40 percent of American children labeled as "at-risk." The model was based on the premise that in spite of their past and an environment of failure, these children can learn successfully and continuously through the balancing of the "best" from universal education and cultural diversity. The model was designed to provide an explanation for behavior and to serve as a generalized research and design format for motivating and producing success in school and in life. An opening section describes the group labeled "at-risk" and the challenges they present. Components and guidelines for the model are then presented. They are: genuine care and concern for students; commitment to missions and goals; creative modification and design; continuous integration of cultural competence and developmental competence; one-to-one tutoring; promoting visual literacy; core and situational self-esteem; Kwanzaa/universal values; conflict resolution; DARE; teacher researcher/instructional designer extended time with students; discipline; assessment; parent involvement; use of support services; self-reflection; and continuous improvement. Each of these is described briefly. (Contains 115 references.) (JB)

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ED 383 647

CONTINUOUS LEARNING: BALANCING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY FOR AT-RISK

A Developing, Generalizing, Working Model

Marie Demery, Ph.D.

April 1995

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CONTINUOUS LEARNING: BALANCING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY FOR AT-RISK

A Developing, Generalizing, Working Model

Abstract

This proactive research and development model presents data of misfortune, reality, and hope for approximately 40 per cent of American children labeled as "at-risk." As a reflection of a premise of hope, these children--unlike their past and environment of failure--can learn successfully and continuously through the balancing of the "best" from universal education and cultural diversity. The model is composed of--

1. Purpose.
2. The Other Important Americans--A Portrait.
3. Components and Guidelines.
    - Care.
    - Commit to Missions and Goals.
    - Modify/Design Creatively.
    - Continue to Integrate.
    - Discipline.
    - Assess.
    - Involve Parents.
    - Use Support Services.
    - Self-Reflect.
    - Improve Continuously.

More than 100 resources are included in the Bibliography.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING: BALANCING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY FOR AT-RISK

A Developing, Generalizing, Working Model

But the fact is, unless we educate all the children, in 30 years, and certainly in 60 years, we're going to be a Third World country because we won't be able to compete; we won't have enough well-educated people. But America doesn't see that; it wants to see the here and the now. That kind of narrowness and selfishness has gotten the country in trouble and continues to take it on a downhill course.

Dr. James P. Comer
Professor, Child Psychiatry and Yale Child Care Center
(Nick Chiles, "Making Schools Work," Essence, December 1993, p. 140.)

What's been going on in school reform is insufficient. This time the focus must be on the early years. School failure starts very early, and if all children do not have a good beginning, if they do not receive the support and encouragement needed during the first years of life, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to compensate fully for the failure later on.

Ernest L. Boyer, President
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
(Tamara Henry, "Creating the Ideal Elementary Education," USA Today, April 11, 1995, p. 6D.)

CONTINUOUS LEARNING: BALANCING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY FOR AT-RISK

A Developing, Generalizing, Working Model

Contents

	Page
Purpose	1
The Other Important Americans-- A Portrait	1
At-Risk Model Components and Guidelines	5
Care	5
Commit to Missions and Goals	6
Modify/Design Creatively	6
Continue to Integrate	12
Discipline	17
Assess	18
Involve Parents	19
Use Support Services	19
Self-Reflect	20
Improve Continuously	20
Bibliography (Partial)	20

CONTINUOUS LEARNING: BALANCING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY FOR AT-RISK

A Developing, Generalizing, Working Model

Purpose

Including a portrait of the At-Risk, the purpose of this Model is to provide an explanation for behavior and to serve as a generalized research and design format for motivating and producing success in school and in life.

The Other Important Americans--A Portrait

Approximately 40 per cent of American children have been labeled as "educationally disadvantaged," "culturally deprived," "minority," and, since 1983, "at risk." Books-In-Print, currently, lists publications with the above labels under the heading of "Socially Handicapped."

These children are found in about equal amounts in urban and rural areas. They are from poor families and from primarily the minority groups of African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and some Asians. They have the highest rates of dropout, retention, and placement in special education.

American public schools presently are not successfully educating these students. Amazingly, public schools are still segregated by income and race. As a result, some have few

resources, low expectations, and few students, especially African American, placed in gifted/talented classes. Whereas, schools with white students are more likely to have sufficient resources.

In addition, these At-Risk children come to school marked by the destructive characteristics of failure. Varying degrees of neglect and abuse are regular experiences in home-life. According to experts in early childhood education, this young population will rarely have a successful academic future, especially without early intervention before the age of five.

Even the best of schools cannot fully overcome this failure that has become a way of life in homes. This lack of nurturing and motivation in homes is not on decline. The teen pregnancy rate is on an increase.

This kind of negative poverty and a major result of lack of parental involvement for At-Risk children also generate the causes of behavioral problems, for example, malnutrition, frustration, and short attention spans. Approximately 50 per cent of African American children live in poverty. Yet, not all children living in poverty should be labeled as "behavioral problems" and "at-risk."

However, children from a background of failure with little concern for education is an explanation for understanding why academic skills and drills are perceived as boring and

unimportant. As early as third grade, these children mentally dropout as a result of two backgrounds: homelife and non-exciting pedagogy. This impoverished pedagogy is reinforced when little effort is made to integrate fully cultural knowledge, skills, and values from their heritage and history. Motivation to learn continues to plummet, from ages 8 to 14, when students do not see and learn about external images of themselves as good, positive, and competent.

From mentally dropping out to physically dropping out, these children continue to promote the cycle of failure--

1. Become like their parents--often high school dropouts.
2. Have more than one teenage pregnancy.
3. Develop firmly implanted images of negative school experiences, further producing restentment and non-positive attitudes and values for education.
4. Know few who have benefited from education.
5. Continue to live with economic, social stresses.
6. Unable--as parents--to give children any kind of experiences for success in school.
7. Provide--as a result--very little or no involvement in school programs.

Branded with the failure syndrome from home and mentally dropping out at the third grade level, the psyche and physical actions of these students become entrenched with anti-academic attitudes and behaviors at the fifth and

sixth grade levels. As a consequence, working with these grade levels becomes exceedingly difficult for channeling energies for improving.

Many of these children, however, are developmentally capable. Moreover, they are merely a reflection of their culture, be it anti-education, violence, drugs, or all attributes. These children have learned and are acting out what their culture values and considers "normal."

Realistically, they are the most serious, significant problems for American education. But, there is hope; furthermore, children are resilient, if provided with the necessary positive interventions.

Realistically, this population is America's most untapped resource. We need to stop relating to them as deficiencies. We need to see them as culturally competent. We need to see them as solutions, as culturally diverse opportunities for achieving higher levels of challenging learning--not just the platitude that "all children can learn." We, thus, will begin to learn that learning begins with what they know, can do, then imparting to them the best of universal, educational knowledge, skills, and values, and including their parents and significant others, any way, whenever, which way we can.

At-Risk Model

Components and Guidelines

1. Care.
2. Commit to Missions and Goals.
3. Modify/Design Creatively.
4. Continue to Integrate.
5. Discipline.
6. Assess.
7. Involve Parents.
8. Use Support Services.
9. Self-Reflect.
10. Improve Continuously.

Care

Although an arduous task, we must care. The Comer Process and other programs in effective, successful operation clearly demonstrate that children--irrespective of family and economic status--learn best from adults who care about and support them.

As significant others and schools, we must do what was traditionally provided by flourishing marriages, extended families, and communities. We must become the moral, ethical equivalent of families for children who have little or no values for learning, little or no academic skills, and little

Care (cont'd.)

or no adult support at home. We must daily, consistently create, invest in positive, stable learning interactions and environments that value and nurture children as unique individuals and as unique learners.

Commit to Missions and Goals.

Through the daily process of individual and group commitment to clearly defined, articulated missions and goals, programs can be successfully developed, implemented, and replicated to meet critcal needs, provide solutions to complex problems, and benefit all involved. It is the discipline of commitment that provides focus for achieving the realizations of growth and positive advancement of a healthy humanity. This commitment is initiated and maintained through the two-way process of communication: giving and receiving input.

Modify/Design Creatively.

To prevent alienation of culturally diverse populations, it is important that a universal approach be used for problem solving and educational purposes. Through this universal approach, there will be an extraction and synthesis of what is the "best" and appropriate from all involved. Creativity

Modify/Design Creatively (cont'd.)

is that universal approach. It is the foundation, language, and key to the advancement and progress of the human race.

The reality of creativity is that we all have it--whether highly developed, natural, awakening, or suppressed, seemingly beyond the realms of our subconsciousnesses. But, if we are to solve the myriad problems engulfing American education, creativity must be accepted, resurrected, nurtured, and valued, beginning with our children and continuing with ourselves.

The myth of creativity is that "tradition," "imitation," and the "practical" have to be abandoned. Contrariwise, the preceding must be valued and used as points of departure and foundations for the continued enhancement and positive evolution for that which is "original," "novel," "appropriate," and "outstanding."

Creativity begins with the natural listening to our positive inner voices and, yes, some education and further development. Some training is needed for acquiring and using the steps of creativity for making ideas become realities--

1. Preparation.
2. Incubation.
3. Illumination.
4. Translation.

Modify/Design Creatively (cont'd.)

Such training, however, does not require major expenditures. Training can be comprehensive, intensive, in one to two inservice sessions. Some teachers are already using, producing, and succeeding in effectively enhancing their students' love for learning. Training would booster, confirm, and encourage these teachers to continue to improve and provide exciting classrooms for learning, while helping other teachers to release and develop their creative abilities.

That love of learning can be further enhanced by the creative modifications and designs of instructional processes and media through the steps of--

1. Believing that At-Risk students can acquire challenging knowledge, skills, and values, unlike their past performances.
2. Acknowledging that At-Risk children, with effective interventions and time, can catch-up academically with their other regular education classmates.
3. Simplying (modifying) and designing instruction for all children through focusing on the essentials and providing unity through emphasis on depth of study and connections to the real world.
4. Including positive interactions with other adults and peers.

At-Risk Model--9

Modify/Design Creatively (cont'd.)

5. Beginning instruction withwhat children already know, their learning styles, and then gradually introducing new content, ideas, skills, and ways of relating, connecting.
6. Focusing instruction on understanding through actual engagement of the active mental and physical use of knowledge and skills.
7. Making sure that this active kind of learning--mental and hands-on--includes modeling, criteria, feedback, guidance, support and ongoing ways for reflecting (self-evaluating) with such questions as "What did I learn?" (Under creative, supportive conditions, children learn far more than anticipated.)
8. Stressing problem solving, discovering, and the inevitable generation of mistakes, knowing that some forms of learning can only occur from such outcomes. Because through mistakes, powerful connections are made with the past, present, future, and real world. Most importantly, we all learn how to cope with the realistic disappointments and unpredictable areas of life.
9. Providing a variety of structured activities that contain unstructured approaches to learning for all children, irrespective of their individual, family, and background differences.

At-Risk Model--10

10. Keeping creativity alive in all children by--

1) Emphasizing the process rather than the outcome for evaluation.

2) Avoiding excessive monitoring. People and children are most creative when they feel that they are not under surveillance.

3) Helping children to learn to listen to their inner voices and to value internal rewards--sheer satisfaction, enjoyment.

4) Fostering positive risk taking and problem solving--encouraging effort and the production of the "best"--rather than competition, the win-lose situation. If no chances are taken, there can be no learning and coming up with the "unusual," the "innovative."

5) Departing from limited choices to freedom to decide, based on given and children-developed alternatives.

6) Selecting and producing instruction that has room for humor and playfulness, an innate characteristic of all great and everyday creators. Research confirms that teams with that creative state of playfulness and laughter tend to be the most creative and productive. For through the state of playfulness, self-consciousness is eliminated, and individuals begin to <u>flow</u>, feel harmonious, unified, and whole, effortlessly matching skills and knowledge with those of others

Modify/Design Creatively (cont'd.)

and with problems to be solved. (This description does not mean that creative, new solutions are obtained quickly. In fact, as is known, it may take years to solve some problems.)

7) Avoiding overcontrol. With room left for discovery in instruction, children do not need to be told exactly what to do. That knowledge can be obtained from the act of exploring.

8) Avoiding pressuring children with expectations beyond their age, ability, and developmental stage.

11. Selecting and designing instruction for classroom and for homework that does not end with an external reward, but with pleasure, satisfaction, earned self-esteem, love, and a hunger for more creative learning.

If the above procedures--including future discovered and created--are used for modifying and designing instruction creatively, we will begin to work at the problem of preventing children from mentally dropping out at the third grade level. And if we are working with entrenched anti-academic fifth and sixth graders, we will begin and continue the process of reclaiming children. These children, because of their natural state and root of creativity, will again begin to display an enthusiasm and love for learning.

Continue to Integrate.

The integration of the following nine elements into all areas of instruction for the At-Risk will help to balance educational excellence and cultural diversity for continuous learning--

1. Cultural Competence.
2. Developmental Competence.
3. One-To-One Tutoring.
4. Visual Literacy--Traditional and Technological Visual Arts.
5. Core and Situational Self-Esteem.
6. Kwanzaa/Universal Values (Ethics and Citzenship).
7. Conflict Resolution.
8. DARE.
9. Teacher/Researcher/Instructional Designer Extended Time with Students.

Cultural Competence.

Based on the valuing principle for cultural diversity, children are viewed as culturally competent, meaning that their acquired knowledge, skills, and values are a reflection of their culture, community, and race. When projects encourage a school to embrace and appreciate the language and culture of a minority group, the academic achievement levels of these students improve appreciably.

Continue to Integrate (cont'd.)

Developmental Competence.

What is socially acceptable in a community determines which knowledge and skills children acquire, develop, and use. Irrespective of culture and race, children universally develop in predictable sequences in these four ways--

1. Establish pleasing, social relationships with family and friends.
2. Acquire language skills.
3. Give order to their seeing and understanding.
4. Become aware of ability to think, imagine, and create.

One-To-One Tutoring.

One of the most effective kinds of teaching is one-to-one tutoring. This form of instruction--provided by teachers, aides, or peers in and during classes--has helped students to prevent learning problems from further developing, to improve reading skills, and to increase standardized test scores.

Visual Literacy--Traditional and Technological Visual Arts.

There are several definitions for visual literacy that are relevant for helping the At-Risk to succeed academically.

Continue to Integrate (cont'd.)

Visual Literacy (cont'd.)

1. Visual Literacy as a combination of the traditional and technological visual arts--
   a. Traditional Visual Arts--drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics.
   b. Technological Visual Arts--photography, television, computer.
2. Visual Literacy with All Curriculum Areas--defined as a translation from the verbal to the visual and vice versa.
3. Visual Literacy with Viewing of All Environment and Images for All Curriculum Areas--defined as ability to interpret, understand, and evaluate two- and three-dimensional forms.

Through involvement in the processes of traditional and technological visual literacy, students will improve in their abilities to be creative thinkers, doers, problem solvers, and academic achievers.

Core and Situational Self-Esteem.

Both parts of self-esteem (core and situational) produce what is known as "academic self-esteem" and "earned self-esteem."

Core self-esteem is your positive inner self and your inner voice. This inner self and voice help you to see, to

Continue to Integrate (cont'd.)

Core and Situational Self-Esteem (cont'd.)

love, to value, and to believe in yourself at this moment, right now!

Through situational self-esteem you see and value your external qualities. You know that you are good at certain things. You know that you have special talents and abilities for facing and enjoying challenges. Situational self-esteem also helps you to feel satisfaction for your aiblities and to share them with others, teamwork, and your community.

Kwanzaa/Universal Values (Ethics and Citzenship).

Created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, Kwanzaa is a lifelong, nonreligious, cultural process that helps African Americans to connect to their Motherland through the daily practice of these universal values--

1. Unity.
2. Be Yourself.
3. Teamwork.
4. Sharing.
5. Purpose. Goal-Setting. Problem Solving.
6. Creativity.
7. Faith.

Continue to Integrate (cont'd.)

Conflict Resolution.

As a peaceful student and/or teacher mediated approach, conflict resolution helps students--

1. To avoid conflict--on an intellectual basis.
2. To channel constructively anger through "talking it out."
3. To compromise through accepting and practicing win/win solutions.

DARE.

To use input from DARE to encourage, motivate students to value and enjoy longevity, good health, and achieve academic/life successes--by not engaging in the use of drugs, alcohol, and acts of violence.

Teacher/Researcher/Instructional Designer Extended Time with Students.

Literature confirms pronounced improvements in the academic achievement levels of students when teachers stay with them for more than one year.

Discipline.

Focusing on self-control and using consistent, meaningful interventions, discipline can be taught. However, the transforming of negative energies into positive energies will require an indefinitely determined period of time.

Discipline is defined as learned self-control that leads to successful learning in an academic setting. Disruptive behavior is a liability for learners and for learning environments. Research findings indicate that students who misbehave continuously have a high probability for--

1. Dropping out of school.
2. Using drugs and alcohol.
3. Becoming involved in criminal activities at some stage in life.
4. Making future poor adjustments to the worlds of work and marriage.

Some of the most effective disciplinary interventions that promote self-control in the classroom are--

1. Emphasis on clearly defined, posted expectations, rules, and procedures (e.g., following directions).
2. Group discussing, modeling, roleplaying, and evaluating of appropriate behaviors.
3. Goal-setting for individuals and groups.
4. Self-evaluating.
5. Making students accountable; consequences.

Discipline (cont'd.)

6. Monitoring and halting immediately inappropriate behaviors.
7. Using privileges and other positive reinforcements, such as continuous, supportive dialogues and other kinds of interactions.
8. Counseling; verbal reprimands.
9. Time Out: Students are disciplined by being removed from class work area, isolated, but--through listening--continue to receive a varied form of instruction.

Notably, current research is revealing that detentions and suspensions are not effective. If anything, these forms of punishment for improving discipline generate more defiance, more negative responses to authority figures, and more fighting.

Assess.

As with instruction, the most effective, appropriate assessments should reflect measures used in the real world. In addition, a number of measures should be used to help students to learn how to ultimately self-evaluate their own progress, strengths, improvements, and weaknesses in given areas of study.

Assess (cont'd.)

Some researchers and program developers currently do not regard standardized testing as the most dependable, reliable way of evaluating the academic performance of children. The visual arts approach of the portfolio, instead, is considered to be one of the best ways to ascertain and document progress. However, no evaluation of students should be limited to one measurement tool.

Involve Parents.

School success for children is highly correlated with parental involvement and significant others. However, this is an area in public education that needs a tremendous amount of innovative development because of flicker, unpredictable characteristics of parental variables. Presently, two ways of involving and communicating with parents continue to be highly effective--

1. Letters delivered via the postal system.
2. Telephone.

Use Support Services.

Whenever possible--to meet the needs of children--partnerships should be formed with parents, significant others,

Use Support Services (cont'd.)

administrative/child care personnel, community, state, and national resources.

Self-Reflect.

We, as teachers, administrators, and support personnel, must continue to practice self-reflection in order--

1. To engage in a lifetime process of confronting and getting to know more about ourselves . . . .
2. To advocate and meet fully the needs of all students.

Improve Continuously.

One definition of excellence is to improve continuously. This definition applies to individuals, groups, projects, programs, and institutions.

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